PRINCIPALS' RATIONAL AND AVOIDANCE DECISION-MAKING STYLES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON TEACHERS' WORK MOTIVATION IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LAIKIPIA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

Public secondary school teachers' work motivation has been considerably low in Laikipia County, Kenya. This study assessed the principals' rational and avoidance decision-making styles and their influence on teachers' work motivation in public secondary schools in the County. The decision-making model of Scott and Bruce (1995) anchored the study. A descriptive research design was employed, while 13 principals and 261 teachers constituted the sample size of 274 respondents. Interview schedules for principals and the Decision-Making Styles Questionnaire (DMSQ) for teachers were used to collect data. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential techniques with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. The study revealed that principals' rational decision-making style has a positive and significant influence on teacher motivation, with a regression coefficient of B = 0.188 (p < .05), contributing 18.8% to teacher work motivation. Conversely, the avoidance decision-making style showed a negative and significant relationship with teacher motivation, reflected by a regression coefficient of B = -0.114 (p < .05), indicating a 11.4% contribution. The study concluded that rational decision-making by principals significantly boosted teacher motivation, encouraging engagement and participation in school activities. Conversely, avoidance

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decision-making was least preferred, as it negatively impacted teacher morale and contribution. The study advises education authorities to promote rational decision-making by principals through evaluations and training, while discouraging avoidance strategies to enhance teacher motivation, engagement, and school productivity via participatory and intuitive leadership.

Keywords: principals, rational, avoidance, decision-making styles, teachers' work motivation

1. Introduction

Decision-making in education is critical for achieving school goals and motivating teachers. Among the styles used by principals, rational decision-making involves logical methods for gathering information, analyzing alternatives, evaluating options, and taking informed action (Iqbal, Akhtar & Saleem, 2020). This method encourages deliberate and structured problem-solving, especially in complex school environments. Rational decision-making is reported to have a moderate positive effect on teacher motivation (Aboudahr & Olowoselu, 2018). In Egypt, such decisions helped enhance performance and work commitment among teachers (Schildkamp, 2019).

In contrast, avoidance decision-making entails postponing tasks, delegating decisions, or evading direct involvement (Scott & Bruce, 1995). This style showed the lowest impact on teacher motivation in India, as it often results in ambiguity and delays, reducing staff morale (Iqbal, Akhtar & Saleem, 2020). While avoidance may occasionally offer principals room to seek broader consultation, it typically signals disengagement rather than empowerment, thus undermining trust and responsibility in staff (Aboudahr & Olowoselu, 2018).

Principals across diverse regions, including Saudi Arabia, South Africa, and Kenya, are increasingly challenged to move beyond avoidance and embrace logical strategies that motivate educators by aligning decisions with institutional goals (Alamri, 2021; Muhwava, 2022; Shikokoti, Okoth & Chepkonga, 2023). Rational decision-making is especially useful in participatory contexts, where teachers feel acknowledged and valued as contributors to school success (Schildkamp, 2019).

While participatory and intuitive methods dominate educational leadership literature, studies highlight the importance of rational planning in boosting teacher motivation and maintaining institutional integrity. Avoidance, though present, remains the least effective in fostering motivation and should be reconsidered when aiming for long-term development (Iqbal, Akhtar & Saleem, 2020). In a school setting, principals play a pivotal role in influencing teacher work motivation through their decision-making styles, particularly rational and avoidance approaches.

Rational decision-making entails methodical, evidence-based strategies aimed at aligning school operations with Ministry of Education guidelines, covering areas such as curriculum implementation and financial management (Kinyua, 2017). Teachers often

perceive motivation not through extrinsic rewards like salary, but through intrinsic elements such as self-worth, competence, and recognition, conditions supported by clear, rational leadership decisions (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Han & Yin, 2016). Studies indicate that logical and structured principal involvement correlates with teacher satisfaction and improved academic performance (Wolf et al., 2021; Wasserman et al., 2016).

Conversely, avoidance decision-making, in which principals either make decisions in isolation or sideline teachers altogether, has shown detrimental effects. In Laikipia County, over 60% of principals were reported to exclude teachers from key decisions, resulting in diminished motivation, professional alienation, and poor engagement in school activities (Mugwimi, Njoki & Ndung'u, 2020). Teachers described feeling ignored and undervalued, contributing to widespread demoralization and a 68% dissatisfaction rate reported by KUPPET (2023). The avoidance style directly impacted teacher attitudes, promoting indifference, negligence, and reduced effectiveness in classrooms.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of principals' decision-making styles, particularly rational and avoidance approaches, has profound implications for teacher motivation in Laikipia County's public secondary schools. Rational decision-making, characterized by logic and evidence-based choices, can foster autonomy, recognition, and job satisfaction among teachers. In contrast, avoidance decision-making, marked by indecision or reluctance to confront challenges, has led to teacher disengagement and diminished morale. Many teachers report feeling excluded by principals from school-level decisions, resulting in reduced motivation and a decline in student achievement. Despite its significance, limited empirical research exists on how these specific decision-making styles affect teachers' work motivation and performance. This gap hinders informed leadership practices and risks further compromising education standards in Laikipia County.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the principals' rational and avoidance decision-making styles and their influence on teachers' work motivation in public secondary schools in Laikipia County, Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study aimed at achieving the following objectives
1) To determine the influence of principals' rational decision-making style on teachers' work motivation in public secondary schools in Laikipia County, Kenya.
2) To establish the influence of principals' avoidance decision-making style on teachers' work motivation in public secondary schools in Laikipia County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Principals' Rational Decision-Making and Teachers' Work Motivation

Rational decision-making is a structured, intellectually grounded leadership style in which decisions are made through logical evaluation and consultation with others (Aboudahr & Olowoselu, 2018). As noted by Koutouzis and Malliara (2017), it involves anticipatory planning where principals gather relevant information from both internal and external environments to inform their choices. Zaini and Syafaruddin (2020) emphasize that this process demands methodical data collection and assessment to identify the most effective path forward.

In school contexts, rational decision-making is reflected when principals consider multiple alternatives and assess them based on probabilities before selecting the most beneficial option (Arar & Saiti, 2022). These choices ideally enhance qualities in teachers such as autonomy, motivation, and ethical responsibility (Alamri, 2021). Rational decisions are also seen as objectively reasonable by experienced observers (Zaini & Syafaruddin, 2020).

Ryan and Deci (2020) argue that rationality entails the deliberate weighing of various strategies to reach specific institutional goals. Principals using this approach evaluate the likelihood of outcomes and conduct extensive information searches to build logically sound choices (Senaya, 2018). Empowered by this model, school leaders determine their decisions based on targeted goals and structured methodologies (Arar & Saiti, 2022).

According to Onjoro, Arogo, and Embeywa (2015), effective rational decision-making requires meticulous planning and verification of information to ensure accuracy. This style plays a pivotal role in enhancing teacher motivation, accountability, and engagement in school affairs. When teachers are involved in decision-making processes, they experience a greater sense of ownership and morale, which ultimately fosters improved performance and school success (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Empirical studies across diverse educational settings have examined how principals' rational decision-making styles affect teacher motivation. Aboudahr and Olowoselu (2018), in Egypt, surveyed 100 teachers and found that rational decision-making by principals moderately influenced motivation and performance. Their study, using validated questionnaires and descriptive statistics, highlighted a positive link between logical decision-making and instructional outcomes.

In India, Qamar and Rashid (2020) conducted a survey among 960 teachers in Punjab to explore the role of headteachers' decision styles in relation to gender. Using ANOVA and Chi-Square tests, they found that rational decisions were prevalent across genders, though this study emphasized gender dynamics more than motivational outcomes, hence presenting a conceptual gap.

In Australia, Hossein, Rezvani, and Masoodi (2018) surveyed 455 primary school teachers and found that analytical decision-making positively correlated with autonomy and enthusiasm. Their descriptive and correlational design emphasized empowerment

through reasoned leadership. However, the study's context, an advanced education system, limits direct applicability to Kenyan schools. The overall evidence reinforces rational decision-making as a motivator, yet gaps exist concerning avoidance decision styles and their demotivating effects, especially within developing-country contexts like Kenya.

2.2 Principals' Avoidance Decision-making Style and Teachers' Work Motivation

Avoidance decision-making, characterized by delay or evasion in making critical judgments, is often employed by leaders seeking to minimize discomfort or risk (Tanaka, 2017). Beach and Lipshitz (2018) explain that such leaders postpone decisions until the last possible moment, driven by uneasiness associated with confronting outcomes. Shanka and Thuo (2017) similarly note that avoidant leaders tend to act only under pressure, reflecting anxiety or lack of confidence.

In educational contexts, school principals may adopt avoidance decision-making due to fear of error, insufficient experience, or resistance to responsibility (Tanaka, 2017). This tendency is commonly seen among those exhibiting laissez-faire leadership styles. While intended to reduce stress, such avoidance frequently lowers teacher morale and innovation (Beach & Lipshitz, 2018). Avoidance negatively affects teachers' motivation by delaying responses to pressing issues or ignoring concerns altogether (Arar & Masry-Harzallah, 2019). Tanaka (2017) points out that teachers expecting guidance from principals often feel disregarded, which leads to frustration and detachment. When teachers perceive their input as unvalued or unresolved, their commitment to school objectives suffers.

Moreover, avoidance decision-making undermines trust and open communication. Shanka and Thuo (2017) argue that teachers may hesitate to approach principals with concerns, fearing non-responsiveness or disengagement. This erosion of trust compromises collaborative effort, weakens accountability, and adversely impacts school performance. Ultimately, principals who consistently delay decisions risk creating an environment where leadership credibility diminishes and teacher motivation declines, a dynamic counterproductive to a thriving educational culture.

Empirical studies have examined the effects of principals' avoidance decision-making style on teacher motivation, revealing consistent patterns of negative influence across various contexts. In Punjab, India, Qamar and Rashid (2020) surveyed 960 teachers to explore gender variations in decision-making styles of secondary school administrators. Using ANOVA and Chi-Square, they found that while both male and female leaders used a range of decision-making styles, avoidant strategies were rarely adopted, suggesting limited motivational impact. However, since the study focused on gender-related patterns, a conceptual gap remains regarding how avoidance style specifically affects motivation. The contextual gap arises from conducting the study in India.

Similarly, Iqbal, Akhtar, and Saleem (2020) examined decision-making paradigms in Indian public organizations using the Vroom-Yetton model. From a sample of 186

respondents, they found that avoidance style had the lowest mean score, indicating the least impact on employee motivation. The use of the DMSQ tool, validated through expert review, reinforced these findings, though the focus on public universities, rather than schools, introduces a contextual gap, while the broad focus on decision paradigms leaves a conceptual gap in motivation-specific outcomes.

In Turkey, Olcum and Titrek (2017) studied the relationship between leadership decision-making and teacher job satisfaction among 483 primary school teachers. Using standardized decision-making and job satisfaction questionnaires, they found a negative correlation between avoidance and teacher satisfaction, signaling that avoidance undermines staff morale. While relevant, the study's Turkish setting introduces a contextual gap, and its focus on job satisfaction reflects a conceptual divergence from teacher motivation.

Lastly, Al-Omari (2016) conducted an exploratory study in Jordan involving 108 public school administrators to assess the connection between leadership philosophies and decision-making styles. Results showed no significant relationship between leadership style and avoidance decision-making, suggesting that avoidance may operate independently of leadership orientation. Yet, the study's context and emphasis on leadership interaction highlight both geographical and conceptual gaps.

3. Material and Methods

The study adopted a descriptive research design. The sample size was 274 respondents and comprised 261 teachers and 13 principals. Data collection was through the Decision-Making Styles Questionnaire (DMSQ) for teachers and interview schedules for principals. The pilot test comprised a total of 28 respondents, consisting of 2 principals and 26 teachers. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used to determine reliability. The reliability for all the variables was above 0.7 and was deemed satisfactory. Validity was ascertained through the expert review and checks from supervisors and experts in educational management from Kenyatta University. The data collected was analyzed descriptively in the form of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations and inferentially in the form of correlation and regression analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was the software for analysis. Data generated from open-ended questions and interviews was analyzed qualitatively through content analysis and presented in themes and verbatim.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Principals' Rational Decision-Making Style and Teachers' Work Motivation
Table 1 shows how the rational decision-making style of the principal influenced the motivation of teachers. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 denoting strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree, participants were prompted to score the rational decision-making style of the principal on teacher job motivation.

Table 1: Rational decision-making style

Rational	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean	SD
My principal double-checks sources of information before making school decisions	3	5	19	67	6	3.68	0.796
My principal has a rational way of decision-making	5	8	18	57	12	3.64	0.969
My principal makes appropriate decisions concerning teachers' issues in a logical and systematic way	0	3	11	63	22	4.04	0.743
My principal seeks teachers' advice to make right school decisions	3	5	20	63	9	3.70	0.831
My principal often makes clear, carefully thought out decisions on school matters	0	3	16	55	26	3.98	0.882
Composite						**3.82**	**0.804**

The results reveal that principals' rational decision-making style positively correlates with teacher work motivation, showing consistently favorable perceptions across various indicators. The overall aggregate mean score of 3.82 (SD=0.804) suggests that, on average, teachers perceive their principals' rational decisions as motivational. Notably, the item "my principal makes appropriate decisions concerning teachers' issues in a logical and systematic way" received the highest mean score of 4.04, indicating strong agreement and a high motivational effect. The standard deviation of 0.743 reflects minimal variation, suggesting consistent responses among teachers.

Similarly, the statement "my principal often makes clear, carefully thought-out decisions on school matters" garnered a mean of 3.98 (SD=0.882), reinforcing the perception of reliable and thoughtful leadership. The low variation further signifies consensus on the principal's capacity to make informed decisions. Additionally, teachers reported that principals included them in the decision-making process, as shown by the statement "my principal seeks teachers' advice," which had a mean of 3.70 (SD=0.831). This highlights a collaborative environment and reinforces the motivational impact of inclusive leadership.

However, the item "my principal has a rational way of decision making" had a slightly lower mean score of 3.64 (SD=0.969), indicating moderate agreement and greater variability in teacher responses. This points to differing experiences or perceptions of rational practices in decision-making across schools. These findings align with previous research (Aboudahr & Olowoselu, 2018; Qamar & Rashid, 2020; Hossein, Rezvani & Masoodi, 2018), affirming that rational decision-making by school leaders fosters teacher empowerment, recognition, and ultimately, stronger motivation.

4.2 Principals' Avoidance Decision-Making Style and Teachers' Work Motivation

Table 2 shows the influence of principals' avoidance decision-making style on teachers' work motivation. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 denoting strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree, participants were prompted to score the avoidance decision-making style of the principal on teacher job motivation.

Table 2: Avoidance decision-making style

Avoidance	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	Mean	Std. Deviation
My principal usually requires teachers' assistance before making critical school decisions	4	8	26	51	11	3.56	0.937
My principal avoids teachers' input while making critical school decisions	17	42	19	19	3	2.51	1.084
My principal frequently waits until there is extreme pressure before making crucial decisions.	11	49	21	15	5	2.55	1.032
My principal frequently delays making decisions pertaining to teachers.	14	33	27	25	2	2.68	1.043
Important decisions are frequently made at the last minute by my principal.	18	37	24	15	6	2.84	1.142
Composite						2.77	1.048

The results reveal that principals' avoidance decision-making style had a generally negative impact on teachers' work motivation. The overall mean score of 2.77 with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.048 indicates that most teachers perceived this style as ineffective, though opinions varied widely. Teachers felt that avoidance, characterized by last-minute decisions and lack of collaboration, failed to meet their motivational needs in the school environment.

Interestingly, the statement "my principal regularly needs teachers' involvement prior to making crucial school decisions" received a higher mean of 3.56 (SD = 0.937), suggesting moderate agreement that some principals do engage teachers occasionally. This reflects appreciation for collaborative leadership, even when inconsistently applied. In contrast, the statement "my principal usually makes significant decisions at the last moment" had a mean score of 2.84 (SD = 1.142), reinforcing the notion that reactive leadership is viewed unfavorably. The high standard deviation further implies varied teacher experiences.

Overall, the aggregate mean of 2.77 underscores low teacher motivation under avoidance-style leadership. The broad variation in responses also points to inconsistent implementation across schools. These findings suggest that avoidance strategies, lacking transparency and participation, undermine teacher morale and hinder collective responsibility within the school setting. Such practices fail to cultivate the professional support necessary to inspire meaningful teacher engagement and performance. The results support Qamar and Rashid (2020) finding that avoidance style was infrequently used across genders, while Iqbal, Akhtar, and Saleem (2020) reported the lowest motivation scores linked to this approach. Similarly, Olcum and Titrek (2017) observed only moderate teacher job satisfaction under avoidant leadership.

4.3 Teachers' Work Motivation

Table 3 indicates the nature of the status of teachers' work motivation. This was on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 denoting Very Unmotivated (VUM), 2 denoting Unmotivated (UM), 3

denoting Moderately Motivated (MM), 4 denoting Motivated (M), and 5 denoting Very Motivated (VM).

Table 3: Status of teachers' work motivation

Status of Teachers Work Motivation	VUM %	UM %	MM %	M %	VM %	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am motivated since my principal involves teachers in decision-making	6	3	25	53	12	3.62	0.972
I am motivated since my principal has a rational way of decision making	0	6	23	59	11	3.75	0.734
I am motivated since my principal makes school decisions based on inner feelings and reactions	6	21	39	31	3	3.03	0.932
My principal avoids my assistance while making critical school decisions	12	22	31	28	6	2.93	1.113
I am overly motivated by the way my principal makes critical school decisions	2	5	20	59	14	3.79	0.801
Composite						**3.42**	**0.91**

The study's findings reveal that teacher motivation at work averages a moderate level, with a mean score of 3.42 and a standard deviation of 0.91, suggesting a varied motivational climate across schools. Among the influencing factors, rational decision-making by principals emerges as a significant driver. The statement "I am highly inspired by the manner my principal takes crucial school decisions" recorded a mean of 3.79 (SD = 0.801), underscoring that teachers feel encouraged and inspired when principals make thoughtful, structured decisions. This aligns with Abdullah, Ling, and Sufi (2018), who affirm that teacher empowerment and principal engagement in decision-making positively influence motivation.

In contrast, the avoidance decision-making style, where principals resist teachers' input, yields less favorable outcomes. The statement "My principal resists my support while making crucial school choices" had a lower mean score of 2.93 with a higher standard deviation of 1.113, indicating a broader range of negative perceptions and experiences among teachers. This suggests that avoidance strategies, which lack transparency and teacher involvement, demotivate staff and hinder collaborative efforts. The findings reinforce existing research that highlights the motivational value of including teachers in decisions and fostering autonomy. Rational decision-making leads to better engagement, while avoidance strategies tend to alienate teachers and reduce job satisfaction. Ultimately, empowering teachers through rational, inclusive leadership practices is essential for enhancing teacher morale, commitment, and overall school performance (Abdullah, Ling & Sufi, 2018).

4.4 Correlation Matrix
Table 4 shows the Pearson Correlation Coefficients used to evaluate the degree of a linear relationship between the research variables.

Table 4: Correlation matrix

		Teacher work motivation	Rational	Avoidance
Teacher work motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.642**	-.545**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
	N	185	185	185
Rational	Pearson Correlation	.642**	1	.551**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
	N	185	185	185
Avoidance	Pearson Correlation	-.545**	.551**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	
	N	185	185	185

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The study found a strong link (r=-0.642, p<0.05) between teacher job motivation and a rational decision-making approach. The significant positive correlation indicates that as principals increasingly apply rational decision-making, teacher job motivation tends to rise, highlighting the value of thoughtful, structured leadership. This shows that collective decision-making involving teachers motivates staff, enhancing commitment and effort to achieve shared educational goals (Muhwava, 2022). The study found that teacher job motivation and avoidance decision-making style were significantly correlated negatively (r=-0.545, p<0.05). This indicates that as principals increasingly avoid making decisions, teachers' work motivation tends to decline, highlighting an inverse relationship. This supports findings by Iqbal, Akhtar and Saleem (2020) and Olcum and Titrek (2017), who reported that avoidance styles correlate with lower job satisfaction and diminished teacher engagement.

4.1. Coefficients Analysis
Table 5 presents the regression coefficients analysis of study variables.

Table 5: Regression results

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.537	.259		2.071	.040
	Rational	.188	.039	.267	4.833	.000
	Avoidance	-.114	.048	-.126	-2.363	.019
a. Dependent Variable: Teacher work motivation						

Teacher work motivation = 0.537 + 0.299 Rational + 0.362 Avoidance + error

The study revealed that principals' rational decision-making style had a positive and significant influence on teacher motivation, with a regression coefficient of B = 0.188 (p < .05), contributing 18.8% to teacher work motivation. These findings align with Aboudahr and Olowoselu (2018), who found that rational leadership enhances teacher performance

and motivation. Similarly, Shikokoti, Okoth, and Chepkonga (2023) emphasized that involving teachers in decision-making fosters motivation, job satisfaction, and performance through shared leadership and professional engagement.

Conversely, the avoidance decision-making style showed a negative and significant relationship with teacher motivation, reflected by a regression coefficient of B = -0.114 (p < .05), indicating a 11.4% contribution. Teachers tend to be demotivated when principals avoid involvement or delegate decisions without inclusive engagement. This supports Qamar and Rashid (2020), who observed avoidance as the least preferred style across genders, and echoes Iqbal, Akhtar, and Saleem (2020), who reported its minimal effect on teacher motivation, reinforcing its ineffectiveness in educational leadership.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that rational decision-making by principals significantly boosts teacher motivation, encouraging engagement and participation in school activities. Conversely, avoidance decision-making style negatively impacts teachers' morale and contribution and is therefore the least preferred.

6. Recommendation

The study advised education authorities to promote rational decision-making by principals through professional and management training and development, while discouraging avoidance strategies to enhance teacher motivation, engagement, and school productivity via participatory and intuitive leadership.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author(s) declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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